



GRANTS NEWS YOU CAN USE

Conservation Commission Grants Program Newsletter



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WACD Annual Meeting

These conventions just get better and better! Congratulations go to Executive Director Pat McGregor for putting it together, as well as President Colin Bennett and the WACD Board of Directors for their support and leadership in making the event run so smoothly.

Congratulations, too, go to the following individuals and groups who were recognized at the Tuesday night awards banquet:

- WADE Employee of the Year – Vicki Ely, Spokane County CD
- Professional Service Award – Susanne Murphy, Soil Scientist, Spokane County CD
- Applied Conservation Award – John Gillies, NRCS District Conservationist, Whatcom CD
- Eugene Schloz Award – Bill Hume, Associate Supervisor, San Juan County CD
- Wildlife Farm of the Year – Pirie and Jane Grant, Othello CD
- NRCS Partnership Award – Okanogan CD partnership (group); Nick Somero, Chair, Pacific CD (individual)
- Special Service Award – Alayne Blickle, King CD (Model Horse Farm Project)
- Wayne Reid *Young Tiger* Award – Randy James, Supervisor, Spokane County CD
- President's Choice Award – Vicki Ely, Spokane County CD
- Plant Material Center Recognition Award – Betty Norton, Chair, Skagit CD

THANK YOU, ALL, FOR YOUR GREAT WORK!

Changes in grants program policies

At their November 29, 2000 meeting, the Conservation Commission acted on five recommended grants policy changes proposed by the Grants Policy Advisory Committee. The Commission adopted the three changes shown below:

- The cost-sharing limit for Dairy Nutrient Management Grants was increased from \$25,000 to \$50,000 per operation, per grant.
- The cost-sharing rate under Dairy Nutrient Management Grants was increased from the base rate of 50% to 75% for all dairies. However, when Commission grant funds are used for cost-sharing, the total cost-sharing rate from all fund sources may not exceed 75% (in other words, the Commission wants to see the landowner commit to 25% of the practice cost).
- The Commission will make available a part of its CREP financial assistance money for loans to landowners who need it to install a riparian buffer prior to receiving their federal Practice Incentive Payment (PIP). These loans will be made at zero percent interest, and will extend until the riparian buffer is certified, but no longer than three years. Landowners receiving these loans will repay the State by assigning their PIP payment to the Commission. The Commission will provide a model agreement to all CREP districts for these loans.

These three revisions to Commission grants policy are effective November 29, 2000. The higher cost-sharing ceiling and rate may be used on any cost-sharing agreement that has been approved by the board of supervisors, and for which payment has not yet been received by the landowner or operator. In other words, if the cooperator has already been paid for a practice under the old rate, he/she cannot retroactively be paid more now to make up the difference between the old and new rates. But if the cost-share has not yet been paid to the cooperator, the district may use the new, higher rate to calculate the amount. If you have questions

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about how to apply this policy in specific cases, please call any of the grants staff.

Recommendations of the Grants Policy Advisory Committee that were not approved

- The Commission rejected a proposal to cost-share on practices contained in unapproved Dairy Nutrient Management Plans. This action was taken due to the potential for operator defaults and the lack of staff time at both districts and the Commission to adequately deal with this issue.
- The Commission took no action on a proposal to increase Dairy Nutrient Management Technical Assistance funding from \$1.5 million to \$2 million per biennium. This was based on the Legislature's history of including provisos in the Commission's budget appropriation that spell out how funds are to be used within each program. The consensus at the Commission meeting was for WACD to address this issue directly with legislators, if they deem it a high priority.

IRS determination letter

Some districts applying for grants from private foundations have been asked for an "IRS determination letter" as part of the application process.

According to the IRS, a determination letter is the formal recognition that a conservation district is tax exempt. A determination letter costs \$500 and must be requested on specific IRS forms: Forms 1023, Form 8718, and Publication 557 (the instruction booklet).

If you believe you need a determination letter, the first thing you should do is call the IRS with your federal identification number in hand. The toll-free number to call is 1-877-829-5500, the "employee plans and exempt organizations" line. Follow the automatic menu instructions. If you can provide IRS with your federal ID number, they can look up your district and see if you've ever been issued a formal determination letter.

A message from Alexa

The legality of conservation districts granting scholarships to private individuals has been the subject of continuing discussions between the state Auditor's Office, the Commission, and the districts.

Based on legal advice from the state Attorney General's Office, which was sought at the urging of

the districts, the Auditor's Office maintains that the granting of such scholarships violates state law (RCW 89.08) and constitutes an unconstitutional gift of public funds (Article VIII, Section 7).

If you have any questions, please contact Assistant Audit Manager Alexandra Johnson at 360-664-3149.

Moo loans are easier now

At least easier to qualify for. Federal eligibility criteria has changed for dairies that impact water quality in any estuary that is part of the National Estuaries Program. In Washington State, this includes Puget Sound and the Lower Columbia River basins.

This means that dairies with NPDES permits, or which are under formal enforcement action, and are located within these estuaries are now eligible to apply for low interest SRF loans.

We are presently negotiating with Ecology about extending the SRF Loan program (which is scheduled to expire on December 31, 2000). If any of your dairy operators are likely to apply for these loans, let Cheryl Witt (360-407-6205) know ASAP.

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*Happy Holidays !*



*From your grants staff*